

Ab Austro

Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

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Priory update

Dear Friends,

A steady succession of volunteers has been a most welcome part of this month of May, the principle result being that 12 of the 18 monk cabins are now very close to completion. A few inside shots of what the monks will be seeing each day as they pray and study in their new cells are offered in this issue, and it is hoped that with the next edition we will be able to announce an actual move. Our gratitude only increases to all those who have helped with the work as well as to those who financed the materials and the paid labour that was required at certain stages of the project.

Talking about constructions, another very important bit of news is that the community, after a few years of prayer and consultation, has finally made a decision as to the site of the future monastery. For those who have visited the property it is the place known as Mount Olivet, one of the highest hills on the estate where, you may recall, a young olive tree was planted almost two years ago. In a few months' time, we hope to make available to the public the master plan for the future monastery.

On 8 May, Fr Prior, accompanied by Brothers Bede and Gregory, spent the day in Hobart taking part in preparation for the upcoming Australian Plenary Council. The time was spent listening to speakers and discussing in small groups the aspirations of the faithful, and what we hope to see from the plenary council. Among the more significant suggestions that they were happy to hear were a desire from many of the people for a deeper formation in the faith in order to be able to share it with others, and also some interesting ideas about how to favour a strong spiritual life which is the indispensable launching pad for any authentic evangelisation.

Brother Chronicler



Retreats

We are happy to announce retreats in Marburg, QLD on the following dates: Women from 27 to 30 September. Men from 1 to 5 October.

The Galong, NSW retreats are filling up, even though there is still space. Now's the time to book in before it's too late! Dates are: Men from 28 June to 3 July. Women from 5 to 8 July.

Please help us spread the word far and wide so that as many as possible may be able to experience the time of silence and contemplation afforded by these times of retreat.
retreats@notredamemonastery.org





In the school of St Benedict

(Chapter One, On the Kinds of Monks, 6-9)

The third kind of monks is that detestable one of the Sarabaites, who not having been tested, as gold in the furnace, by any rule or by the lessons of experience, are as soft and yielding as lead. In their actions they still conform to the standards of the world, so that their tonsure marks them as liars before God. They live in twos or threes, or even singly, without a shepherd, in their own sheepfolds and not in the Lord's. Their law is their own good pleasure: whatever they think of or choose to do, that they call holy; what they like not, that they regard as unlawful.

Before proceeding with drawing up the Rule for cenobites, St Benedict feels the need to put his monks on their guard against bad, or shall we say, false kinds of monks. It's not so much about pointing the finger at the bad monks as it is about showing earnest disciples what not to do and how to avoid it.

The Sarabaites, the saint tells us, have one fundamental flaw, which is the cause of all their vices: they are soft, not like marshmallows, but like lead. Lead is not entirely bereft of solidity. It looks hard and you can do a lot of things with it, but it's not pure like gold. The Scriptural passage St Benedict is referring here is undoubtedly this one: *Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation. Humble thy heart, and endure: incline thy ear, and receive the words of understanding: and make not haste in the time of clouds. Wait on God with patience: join thyself to God, and endure, that thy life may be increased in the latter end. Take all that shall be brought upon thee: and in thy sorrow endure, and in thy humiliation keep patience. For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation* (Sir 2:1-5).

Passed through the heat of the furnace, pure gold liquefies and flows forth from the crucible, leaving behind all impurity. So, the soul that seeks God must be tried under the heat of trials and tribulations, of humiliations and holy obedience. Such is the way that a man becomes spiritual gold. Until then he is soft as lead, and can become prey to all the vices.

We are told that the Sarabaites, even though they are garbed and shorn as monks, really are liars, for their appearance singles them out as men of God estranged from the ways of the world, while their conduct is quite the opposite. They speak of laws and of holiness, but when we scratch the surface we find that their laws are of their own making and their

holiness is a farce. If something flatters their ambition and sensuality, it is the law, and they pretend it makes them holy. If they find anything distasteful, it becomes reprehensible. In the end, these monks make a mockery of the very idea of religious life, which is first and foremost an emptying of self in order to follow Christ.

We must be honest and admit that we all have a Sarabaites lurking in the corners of our heart. The natural penchant of fallen nature is to canonise our own doings and likings and to condemn what does not suit us. We tend to favour quick fixes and easy solutions. But there are no quick fixes or easy solutions on the way that leads to God. The real teacher is long experience and the workshop is patient endurance under the fire of self-denial and privations. If we seek any other way, we are deluding ourselves and playing the Sarabaites.

If one accepts, however, the true conditions for holiness, then what flows out from the crucible will be marvellous. It will astound even the angels of God by its pristine beauty and its wholesome lustre. Let's think of that each time we see the masterpiece of a goldsmith: a chalice, a ciborium, a crucifix, a ring. If that gold had not been put through fire, it would not delight my eyes today. Let us accept to pass through the furnace that one day others may benefit from our purification. As St Benedict says elsewhere: *Let us not wish to be called holy before we are holy; but first to be holy, that we may be truly so called* (Rule, ch. 4).



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via newsletter@notredamemonastery.org

Br Paphnutius discovers the liturgy

As the monastic beehive begins to hum once again after Prime, Br Paphnutius, as a good junior monk, makes his way to the classroom or, depending on the day of the week, to his cell. He may have Novice class with Father Master, or he may study the Psalms or the Catechism or Chant.

The monk's principal task is the solemn celebration of the Divine Office, and to do that well, he must learn the sacred texts and the chant. But this presupposes the study of Latin. Br Paphnutius considers what St Paul VI wrote shortly after Vatican II: "There is no doubt that the Latin language creates some, and perhaps not slight, difficulties for the novices of your sacred militia. But this is not to be considered such that it cannot be overcome, especially among you who, farther from the troubles and the breathlessness of the world, can more easily dedicate yourself to study. Moreover, those prayers permeated with ancient greatness and noble majesty continue to attract to you the young people called to the Lord's inheritance; otherwise, once the Gregorian chant which transcends the borders of nations and is endowed with admirable spiritual strength and the melody that springs from the depths of the soul where faith resides and charity burns has been eliminated, the choir will be like a dull candle that no longer illuminates, no longer attracts to itself the eyes and minds of men" (*Sacrificium Laudis*, 15 August 1966).

Four monk cabins are still looking for sponsors (and patron saints). Fr Prior has announced that the construction of these will commence shortly, so we are trusting in Divine Providence to come through. If you would like to help, we calculate materials for each cabin at approximately \$12,500.

But even though Brother Paphnutius is an avid learner, there are days when he'd rather go and do something else – Boys will be boys and Brother is a boy! Besides, there is so much going on out there on the construction site, and so much wildlife to chase down! Then it is that he reminds himself that the monastery is a school in which one learns to serve the Lord. It is a lifelong effort to learn as much about God as one can. One thought that helps motivate him when he's having a not so good day is that in Heaven the degree of our closeness to God through knowledge and love will be in proportion to the knowledge and love for Him that we have in this life. Far from being one size fits all, the glory of Heaven will be in proportion to one's work for God in this life. If we do not learn to love in this life, we will not love in the next, and the better we are at it, the greater our ecstasy in Heaven. Thoughts such as these stimulate Br Paphnutius to apply himself eagerly to his studies. (No, you can't learn Latin in Heaven! It's now or never...)



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JESUS MARIA JOSEPH

I am come to cast fire on the earth,
and what will I, but that it be kindled?

Lk 12:49

At the end of the *Spiritual Exercises*, in order to facilitate contemplation, St Ignatius provides a list of Mysteries of the Life of Our Lord. These mysteries take us from the Annunciation to the Ascension. Some have expressed surprise that there is no contemplation of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Is this not part of the mysteries of salvation?

To elucidate this question, here is a true story. There was once a retreatant, somewhat on the charismatic side, who, upon arriving at the monastery, informed the retreat master: “My parish priest, Father So and So, sent me here to prepare for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.” The retreat master replied: “I know Father So and So. If he sent you here to prepare for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, I believe we can safely conclude that the Exercises might be beneficial in that regard.” “Fair enough,” replied the retreatant, “let’s give it a go.” And so the retreat began. A few days later, the retreatant returned and announced: “Father, you were wrong. The Exercises are not a preparation for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They *are* the outpouring of the Holy Spirit!”

The truth of that statement becomes obvious when we consider this word of Our Lord: *When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will teach you all truth. For He shall not speak of Himself; but what things soever He shall hear, He shall speak. And the things that are to come, He shall shew you. He shall glorify me: because He shall receive of mine and shall shew it to you* (Jn 16:13-14). And again: *The Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you* (Jn 14:26).

The role of the Paraclete, then, is to point to Christ, to lead to Him, to designate Him as the Way, the Truth and the Life. This being so, it’s not hard to understand how the Spiritual Exercises are the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, for they consist essentially in being drawn ever more into the contemplation of the life of Christ in order to know Him more intimately, to love Him more ardently and to follow Him more closely. The soul that does this is carried along mightily by the Spirit of the Lord. And God alone knows where that will lead. *The Spirit breatheth where He will and thou hearest His voice: but thou knowest not whence He cometh and whither He goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit* (Jn 3:8).

